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ABSTRACT

This report examines motivational variables and support structures that influenced the success of African American females who graduated with honors from a rural Georgia high school. Case studies focus on the nature of the honor graduates' friendships and the role that friendship may have played in motivating these students to become honor graduates. Subjects were 6 of the 10 African-American females who were 1996 honor graduates. Data were collected from a participant questionnaire and interview protocol; school transcripts; and instruments assessing intelligence, self-concept, motivational orientation, and school attitudes. Participants had ability scores in the average to above average range and grade point averages ranging from 89.86 to 93.64 percent. Participants perceived themselves to be strongest in the area of behavioral conduct; global self-worth and social acceptance were also very positive. The only domain in which the group mean indicated negative self-perceptions was athletic competence. In addition, participants felt most successful when learning new and interesting things, solving tricky or complex problems, understanding complicated ideas, and thinking. The group agreed that the purposes of schooling were to teach students to overcome obstacles, set high standards and not give up, prepare for challenging jobs, become creative problem solvers, and be imaginative. Although participants reported that they had strong support from parents and other family members, it was the casual yet consistent support from friends that proved to be a critical factor in their pursuit of high academic achievement. Appendices include descriptions of the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents, the Motivational Orientation Scales, and Scales for Assessing the Purposes of School. (LP)

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Preliminary Report:
Achievement Motivation in Rural African-American Female High School Honor Graduates

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Georgia Southern University

Paper presented at the Twentieth Annual Conference of the Eastern Educational Research Association, Hilton Head Island, SC, February 19-22, 1997.

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Preliminary Report:
Achievement Motivation in Rural African-American Female High School Honor Graduates

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Preliminary Report:

Achievement Motivation in Rural African-American Female High School Honor Graduates

Every year relatively small numbers of students in every high school in the nation graduate as honor graduates. What motivates these students to achieve academically when others with the same ability do not? When these students are females, we are not surprised since generally higher numbers of females achieve this honor. When these females are from rural communities and African-American, though many would say we should not be surprised, we still are. Just recently, a national study revealed that after years of progress, the achievement of minority students in comparison to Euro-American students is again widening even though minority numbers have increased; " Today, African-American, Latino, and Native American students perform well below whites in all subjects and at all grade levels" (Olson, 1996, p. 31). This report is alarming.

It came to the attention of the research group that the class of honor graduates from the largest high school in the rural community in which the university is located was graduating its largest class of honor graduates in recent history. Within this group of honor graduates, there was a noticeable number of minority students, primarily female, some of whom we knew were friends. With an appreciation of the role of motivation in achievement and concern about the relatively low numbers of rural African-American females who attain high school honor graduate status, the focus of the research was to explore motivational variables and support structures that might have been instrumental in the success of these young women. We were curious about the nature of their friendship and the role it might have played in assisting them to become honor graduates.

Theoretical Framework and Perspectives

The theoretical framework of this research is derived from the study of motivation. Constructs explored included goals, affiliation, efficacy, school climate and persistence. Other important theoretical perspectives were drawn from Harter (1988), who investigated the importance of self-perceptions of ability, and Nicholls (1989) who explored the roles of task/ego orientation and perceptions concerning the importance of status, loyalty, creative endeavor, and persistence.

To explore which motivational variables were instrumental in the academic successes of these young women, we used a case study approach. Using case study research as empirical

inquiry provides the opportunity to view perceptions of events and influences in a detailed, concrete and real life developmental context (Moon, 1991).

Methodology

This study combined both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative methods focused on measures of ability and motivation, basic biographical data, and curriculum experiences while the qualitative methods provided insight into the participants' perceptions related to motivational factors, using a holistic, multiple-case design (Moon, 1991) aimed at describing the achievement motivation of several honor graduates.

Participants

The participants in this study were six of the 10 African-American females who were 1996 honor graduates from a public high school located in southeast rural Georgia. There were 61 honor graduates, with 42 females, the largest class of honor graduates in recent history (personal communication, May, 1996). The high school, a school of excellence, is the largest of three public high schools and is located in the largest city in the county which has approximately 43,000 residents with over 11,000 who are African-American and has a 63 percent rural population (Bachtel & Boatright, 1995). This city is also the location of a state university with over 14,000 students that employs the researchers. To be honor graduates, students must have a grade point average (GPA) that is a "non-rounded 90 or better average for the four (4) years of high school" (*High School Handbook,* 1995, p. 10). The participants either chose or were assigned pseudonyms to insure confidentiality.

Data Sources

Data were collected from seven sources. A participant questionnaire and a structured interview protocol were developed to obtain qualitative data and background information. The quantitative data came from four other sources and the high school transcripts. One standardized instrument was used: the Kaufman Brief Intelligence Test (K-BIT) (Kaufman & Kaufman, 1990). Additionally, the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (Harter, 1988) and both the Motivational Orientation Scales and the Scales Assessing the Purposes of School (Adapted from THE COMPETITIVE ETHOS AND DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION by John G. Nicholls. Copyright © 1989 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College) were data sources.

Instruments

Participant Questionnaire and Interview Protocol

The participant questionnaire and the interview protocol were developed using structured open-ended questions. The questionnaire focused on 10 demographic variables, four questions on educational background, seven questions on the value of education and family support, and four questions on career aspirations. The 12 interview questions were designed to explore motivation variables and to capture the complexities of individual perceptions of high school academics and achievement.

Kaufman Brief Intelligence Test (K-BIT) (Kaufman & Kaufman, 1990)

The Kaufman Brief Intelligence Test (K-BIT) was developed as a brief measure of both verbal and nonverbal intellectual abilities and yields three scores: Vocabulary, Matrices, and a Composite IQ. Vocabulary measures verbal ability and consists of two subtests: Expressive Vocabulary and Definitions. Nonverbal ability is measured by the Matrices subtest alone. The Composite IQ is an indicator of overall ability based on performance on all three subtests. Vocabulary, Matrices, and Composite IQ are reported in standard scores with a mean (M) of 100 and standard deviation (SD) of 15. The K-BIT is individually administered and is normed for ages 4 through 90. Construct validity studies support substantial correlations with established IQ measures at the age range involved in this study. The manual reports correlations of the K-BIT standard scores with Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale-Revised (WAIS-R) standard scores for ages 16 through 47 as follows: WAIS-R Full Scale with K-BIT Composite, .75; WAIS-R Verbal IQ with Vocabulary, .73; and WAIS-R Performance IQ with Matrices, .60.

Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (Harter, 1988)

This instrument assesses adolescents' sense of competence across nine different domains: Scholastic Competence, Social Acceptance, Athletic Competence, Physical Appearance, Job Competence, Romantic Appeal, Behavioral Conduct, Close Friendship, and Global Self-Worth (see Appendix A for a brief explanation of the contents of each domain). The Adolescent version of the profile is recommended for 9th through 12th grades. The scale uses a structured alternative format in which the students first choose the description for the "teenager most like me" (of two choices), and then indicate whether the description is "sort of true" or "really true" for them. Each item is scored on a scale from 1 to 4. The scoring has been reversed from Harter's original version

so that in this paper, 1 represents high self-perception of ability and 4 represents low self-perception of ability. This was done to maintain consistency with the scoring direction of the other instruments used.

Motivational Orientation Scales (Adapted from THE COMPETITIVE ETHOS AND DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION by John G. Nicholls. Copyright ©1989 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College. Used by permission of Harvard University Press.)

Nicholls (1989) constructed this 27-item scale to distinguish the motivational orientations of students. The introductory question reads: When do you feel you have had a really successful day in school? Students were asked to respond on a scale of 1-5 (1=strongly agree; 5=strongly disagree). The stem for each item is: I feel most successful if . . .

Seven factors found by Nicholls for his high school sample were used in the preliminary analysis. These factors were labeled by Nicholls as follows: Task Orientation I (challenge/strategic effort), Task Orientation II (busy/hard work), Ego Orientation (look smart/excel), Avoid Inferiority, Easy Superiority, Work Avoidance, and Alienation. Further explanation of each factor may be found in Appendix B.

Scales Assessing the Purposes of School (Adapted from THE COMPETITIVE ETHOS AND DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION by John G. Nicholls. Copyright ©1989 by President and Fellows of Harvard College. Used by permission of Harvard University Press.)

These scales were constructed to assess students' views about the functions of school. The general question reads: In your opinion, what are the main things schools should do? Students were asked to respond on a scale of 1-5 (1=strongly agree, 5=strongly disagree). The stem for each item is: A very important thing school should do is . . .

Nicholls divided the questions into four scales: Wealth and Status, Social Commitment, Understanding, and Achievement Motivation. From these four scales, Nicholls' high school sample yielded twelve factors, which were used for the preliminary analysis. These factors were labeled by Nicholls as follows: Wealth, Status I (to reach the top in their jobs/go to best colleges), Status II (to prepare the smartest students for the best jobs), Community Spirit, Loyalty (patriotism), Self-Sacrifice, Useful Work (to help society/better world), Understanding Science, Understanding the Media, Understanding Politics, Creative Work (to keep learning/be imaginative/seek challenging jobs), and Persistence (to overcome obstacles/not give up). Further

explanation of each factor may be found in Appendix C.

Procedures

The participants were identified with assistance from the high school Registrar. They were mailed a packet of materials which included a letter that introduced the study, explained the requirements, and invited their participation. Other materials sent were an informed consent letter, the motivational orientation and purposes of school scales, self-perception instrument, and the participant questionnaire. The participants were contacted by telephone to schedule the administration of the standardized instrument (K-BIT) and the structured interview. The standardized instrument was administered by the psychologist in the research group who has assessment expertise. To reduce interviewer bias, same gender-and-ethnicity pairs were used for the face-to-face structured interviews which were conducted in university offices and lasted less than one hour each. Data collection was completed primarily during the summer between high school graduation and the beginning of the participants' college experience.

Data Analysis

The data from the standardized instrument was scored according to the specified guidelines. The Kaufman Brief Intelligence Test (K-BIT) (Kaufman & Kaufman, 1990) was used primarily to provide insight into the relative role of cognitive ability in academic achievement. The Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (Harter, 1988) and the two Nicholls (1989) scales were selected to provide measures of self-perception and motivation since variables of these are related to academic achievement. Subscale means were calculated for each participant, as well as for the group with the Harter (1988) instrument. Means for each factor were calculated for each participant, as well as for the group on the Nicholls (1989) scales. Descriptive statistical procedures were used for calculating means. The qualitative aspects of this study were used to expand and clarify factors associated with motivation. The high school transcripts were reviewed for verification of grade point averages and to gather data concerning Scholastic Ability Test-I (SAT-I) scores and curriculum choices.

The reliability of this multiple-case study is enhanced by having a four member research team and by its structure which included collection of data using the same instruments for all

participants. In addition, validity is enhanced by the triangulation of data collection methods which emphasized multiple measures of motivation factors from the scales, written and oral responses.

Case Studies

Brooke

Biographical Information

An only child, 18-year-old Brooke lives with her parents in a rural community several miles northwest of the major city in the county. Her mother, who completed two years of college, is employed as an office manager; her father, who completed high school, works as an electrician and plumber. Completing all of her formal education through high school in area public schools, Brooke was involved in a number of activities and clubs in high school and received several awards. In the fall after high school graduation, she plans to attend a four year college and major in building construction and contracting because of a long standing interest in home plans and design.

Brooke said she wanted to be an honor graduate "because I felt that it would be a great accomplishment for my high school career." She graduated with a 92.167 GPA, class standing of 32 out of 275, and enrollment in four Challenge classes. Academic achievements were very important to her "because they reflect (her) attitude on how important school is." Though academic achievements were somewhat important to her parents, Brooke was always encouraged to do her best but never pressured. Her grandparents were primary role models because "they lived in a time when many blacks were denied a decent education."

To achieve good grades, Brooke paid close attention to the teacher in class and applied what she heard when she studied at home. Her perception of teachers "who lacked the ability to teach" effectively were the minor obstacles she faced. Brooke considered herself popular among her peers because she treated everyone alike.

Scales

Brooke's responses on the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (scale of 1 - 4) indicated that she perceives herself to be strongest in the area of Social Acceptance (1.0). Other strong areas were Physical Appearance, Romantic Appeal, and Behavioral Conduct (1.2). She perceived her weakest area to be Athletic Competence (3.4). Other relatively weak areas were Scholastic

Competence (2.4) and Job Competence (3.0). Her Global Self-Worth score was 1.25, suggesting a strong sense of her worth as a person.

On the Motivational Orientation Scale (scale of 1 - 5), Brooke felt most successful when doing well without trying or studying, Easy Superiority (1.0), followed by doing challenging tasks that require strategic effort (Task Orientation I, 1.29). She felt least successful when getting away with doing very little or tricking the teacher (Alienation, 3.75), not having homework/having easy work (Work Avoidance, 3.6), and staying busy and working hard (Task Orientation II, 3.5). This pattern suggests a belief that easy success is an indicator of high ability, but only if the tasks are challenging and worth doing. She is not especially interested in simply staying busy, nor is she seeking to avoid worthwhile and difficult tasks.

When asked about the Purposes of School (scale of 1 - 5), Brooke agreed most that schools should teach students to persist in the face of obstacles and should prepare students to seek jobs requiring imagination and creative problem solving ability (Persistence & Creative Work, 1.25). Other strong factors involved preparing students to compete for top jobs and colleges (Status I, 1.6), Understanding Media (1.67), and Understanding Politics (1.75). She agreed least that schools should prepare students to attain wealth and leisure (Wealth, 3.5).

Interview

Brooke wanted to be an honor graduate because "they are the first to walk across the stage at graduation" and "because most of her friends and classmates were going to be honor graduates." In ninth grade she realized that she had to "maintain her average throughout the year." She knew she could make the grades; all she had to do was "keep them up and not let others discourage her." In order to be successful, Brooke was not involved in a lot of social activities, and she studied when necessary. She stayed on track by studying hard, maintaining her grades and not letting others discourage her.

Her friends, most of whom were also honor graduates, were in her grade and often in her classes. About half she had met along the way in elementary school, while others she met in her high school classes. The group of friends expanded as they introduced one another. These friends studied, worked, and played together. Brooke said about wanting to graduate together, "We just wanted to maintain our grades. We didn't express . . . we're going to be honor graduates and put ourselves on a shelf or anything."

In response to questions which addressed what they did as friends that was helpful, she gave these examples. They studied together. When she was in class with some of her friends and they had an assignment that required working in groups, they would gravitate toward each other. In addition, although the lunch schedule varied, usually some friends had lunch at the same time; they also talked between classes at their lockers which were generally adjacent.

Encouragement came from both family and friends. Family wanted her to do her best and in some cases to do better than they had done. Brooke also knew that "good grades" would help her to further her career aspirations and attain a "nice" lifestyle. Although she never felt like giving up, discouraging to Brooke at times were those who gave her the impression that she wasn't "good enough for them," but that made Brooke work harder; and the occasional teacher who "overlooked" Brooke. She explained "because I was the only black (student) in some of my classes and (the teacher) would like overlook some people . . . wouldn't pay me any attention."

Bootsey

Biographical Information

Nineteen-year-old Bootsey and her younger brother have divorced/separated parents who completed two years of college and work at different industries in the community. She completed twelve years in area public schools, participated in a number of activities and clubs, and received several awards. Bootsey plans to attend the hometown university and major in nursing, a career she has always been interested in pursuing. She "always wanted to do well in school . . . (and) worked hard at doing (her) best" which made her parents happy and resulted in (her) being an honor graduate. An obstacle was her "silly pride" regarding "not requesting the extra help she needed and caused her not to get the grades she wanted in some classes." However, she still earned a GPA of 92.476, graduated with a class standing of 30 out of 275, and was enrolled in one Challenge class. The strategies she used to get good grades included listening in class for what was important, making studying fun, and taking breaks when needed. Academic achievements were somewhat important to her parents and very important to her. These achievements with "God's" help will move her "forward in life." Her grandmother was a role model because she always did what she said and that meant a "great deal to her."

Scales

Bootsey's responses on the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (scale of 1-4) indicated that she perceives herself to be strongest in Behavioral Conduct (1.0), followed by Close Friendships (1.2), Social Acceptance and Job Competence (1.4), and Global Self-Worth (1.5). She considered Romantic Appeal and Scholastic Competence (2.4) and Athletic competence (2.8) to be her weakest areas. Only one other participant scored herself that low in Scholastic Competence with a group mean of 1.6.

The only factor Bootsey strongly agreed with on the Motivational Orientation Scale (scale of 1-5) was feeling successful when work is challenging and requires strategic effort (Task Orientation I , 1.7). She tended to disagree with looking smart and doing better than others (Ego Orientation, 3.2), and tricking the teacher or getting away with doing very little (Alienation, 3.75).

On the Purposes of School Scale (scale of 1-5), Bootsey strongly agreed that schools should teach Persistence (1.5), prepare students to make the world a better place and help society (Useful Work, 1.6), and prepare students to vote wisely and assess issues (Understanding Politics, 1.75). The only purpose with which she disagreed strongly was recognizing and promoting the success of the smartest students (Status II , 4.33).

Interview

Bootsey was motivated to be an honor graduate by what she heard from those who preceded her about the recognition they told her to expect and to make her family proud. Bootsey scheduled her classes carefully to make it possible; knowing herself, she was careful not to schedule classes together that would be hard for her. Bootsey kept herself on track by studying "really" hard and with a friend. Studying together makes a real difference because "if one didn't know something, the other did." Though involved in a number of activities and clubs at school, Bootsey did not "party" a lot.

Bootsey began to think about being an honor graduate in eighth grade. While attending the high school graduation, she asked about the "yellow things" and learned they were worn by the honor graduates and thought "that would be nice." When she entered the ninth grade, she "asked around" to find out what kind of grades you had to have to be an honor graduate and said to herself "that wouldn't be too hard to achieve." So it started.

In responding to how her friends helped, Bootsey indicated "we all had classes together . . . we had the same teachers. . . we didn't have them . . . in the same period . . . but we (would) sometimes go to the library in the morning and . . . just study together . . . or someone . . . would get us together and like keep us on track."

In describing how the group of friends formed, Bootsey said "one friend would meet someone else and then we would all bring them to the group and then another person would meet someone else in another class and we would bring them to the group." " I think everybody pretty much wanted to be an honor graduate . . . We all just stuck together and we all knew what each other wanted . . . so we supported each other." However, if someone didn't want to be an honor graduate, they did not push; "they weren't just the honor graduate group . . . we were all just friends." Bootsey went on to say "If one wanted to be, everybody else wanted to be. I guess it's like a copy cat thing . . . we didn't want to out do each other; we wanted to be on the same level."

In describing the interaction among themselves, Bootsey said, "we had study groups a lot and we gave each other moral support . . . if one bombed out on a test, the other would say, well, we have three more to go, so you'll do better on the next one." Also, though they would compete to see who got the highest grade, it wasn't a bad thing, it just helped them all do well.

In response to a question addressing what circumstances at the high school were helpful, Bootsey's response focused on "I just knew that in myself I wanted to be an honor graduate and we all just knew we all wanted to be . . . we just studied a lot and . . . I don't think there was any particular circumstance that helped us. It's just a lot along the way."

For Bootsey there wasn't a time when she wanted to give up, any time she felt that she didn't care; she just thought of the honor graduates that had preceded her and how proud her parents would be. They wanted her to do her best and did not push; she pushed herself. Other support and encouragement came from her black teachers who wanted her to be an honor graduate and to be a member of the biggest class of black honor graduates.

Danyelle

Biographical Information

Eighteen-year-old Danyelle has one younger brother and lives with her parents in a small community southwest of the major city in the county. Her mother, who has a Master's degree, is employed as a teacher and her father works as a service technician. Danyelle, who received several

awards, was involved in a number of clubs and activities in high school and completed all of her K-12 education in this rural county. She plans to attend a four year university and major in pharmacy, influenced by her interest in "what's in medications and their influence on the body." She was interested in being an honor graduate to please herself, to make others proud, and to enhance her records. Strategies that helped her be successful included: listening closely, studying with friends, concentrating on her homework, and learning to relax. Academic achievements were very important to her and her parents; they were important to her because they give her a sense of pride and self satisfaction and let others as well as her know that she is "smart" and can achieve that which she strives to achieve. Danyelle graduated with a class standing of 52 out of 275, with an 89.861 GPA, and was enrolled in two Challenge courses. She is aware that training and experience will be needed in the real world. Obstacles to her academic achievement were those classes that brought her grade point average down. She would say that she was popular at school because a lot of people knew her.

She had her parents support and her uncle as a role model because he "took the time to talk to (her) and explain things about life." Regarding her career aspirations, being happy and content were important because you are doing something you like and are comfortable with, and having the income necessary.

Scales

Danyelle's subscale scores on the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (scale of 1-4) were very close for all subscales except the lowest, Athletic Competence (4.0). Her responses indicated that she perceives herself to be strongest in the areas of Scholastic Competence, Social Acceptance, Romantic Appeal, and Behavioral Conduct (2.0). Perhaps most notable for Danyelle is that her Global Self-Worth score (2.25) is lower than that of her peers and lower than the samples reported by Harter.

On the Motivational Orientation Scale (scale of 1-5), Danyelle endorsed feeling most successful when tasks are challenging and require strategic effort, when she looks smart or does better than others, and when she does well without trying (Task Orientation I, Ego Orientation, & Easy Superiority, 2.0). She agreed least with feeling successful by getting away with doing little

or tricking the teacher (Alienation, 3.5). Again, her range of factor means was relatively narrow, suggesting that many of these elements influence her feelings of success.

When asked about the Purposes of School (scale of 1-5), Danyelle agreed most that schools should prepare students to Understand the Media (1.67) followed by teach students to persist in the face of obstacles (Persistence, 1.75). She agreed least that schools should recognize and promote the success of the smartest students (Status II, 3.33), teach students to follow orders even when they don't feel like it (Self-Sacrifice, 3.4), and prepare students to attain wealth and leisure (Wealth, 3.75).

Interview

Danyelle was motivated to become an honor graduate to prove to herself and to others that if she set her mind to it she could accomplish that goal, and therefore so could others. She decided during her ninth grade year because she knew that everything counted and that she could do it. Support came from her parents and her uncle, a recent college graduate, who was influential in helping her make the connections between grades in high school and real life. Discouraged in the eleventh grade when her grades dropped taking physics and trigonometry, she thought of giving up. However, she took the summer to rest. With encouragement from her uncle and friends, Danyelle returned for her senior year knowing that her grade point average was close to ninety and that if she didn't make it, at least she would have tried. She persisted in order to achieve a goal in life and because "her peers were all trying to keep their grades up and go forward, (she) did not want to be left behind."

Some of these friends had met in elementary school; in high school the group grew and their connections were reinforced by taking classes together. These friends were a support group; when they "got together," they talked about grades, tried to keep up in their classes, helped each other, and played! Danyelle said, "when we started taking double A classes in History, we knew those tests were tough, so we . . . got together and made sure that everybody understood it . . ." In describing her friends, Danyelle shared that as freshmen they wanted to be honor graduates; they said, "it would be great, something to be proud of if they made it." As time went on, someone was always friends with someone else; they supported each others' goals; they "stuck" together. "To be an honor graduate you had to be good and then to try and get as many honor graduates that (they) could to make an impact on people and to let them know that we <u>can</u> achieve."

Anita

Biographical Information

Anita, an 18-year-old, resides with her mother and has a 13-year-old sister. She was born and reared in this rural community where her mother received her high school diploma and is currently a preschool teacher at a local day care center. Anita participated in many extracurricular activities while in high school including Beta Club, Educational Talent Search, the African-American Debate Club, and the Upward Bound Project to name a few. She received several academic scholarships and plans to attend a southern, historically black college/university (HBC/U) where she also received an award but is undecided as to what her major will be. Anita's exact career aspirations are unknown, but she would like a career in the field of medicine.

Anita stated the following about wanting to be an honor graduate, "I felt that I was intelligent enough to become an honor graduate. I knew I had the grades, and I wanted to add to the number of African-American students who would also be honor graduates." She graduated with a 90.889 GPA, a class standing of 40 out of 275 students, and was enrolled in one Challenge class. Academic achievements were very important to both Anita and her mother. She felt that the key to success was getting a good education, and she wanted to be very successful. Anita mentioned that,

> If there were any obstacles to my academic achievement, they were internally created. Sometimes, I felt like it was hopeless to try to excel in class when I didn't understand the work. I hate to study, so I try to listen in class and understand facts and concepts so that studying for me is just reviewing.

Her "one and only true role model" is her mother who always encouraged Anita to do well in class and referred on many occasions to her past experiences and wanted "better" for Anita. Her mother loved and supported her in all endeavors but told her "to be flexible in life; if hardships occur, solve them and move on." Along with her mother's influence, Anita was also influenced by participating in the Upward Bound Program at a local university and considered students in this program as "a close knit family, sharing with and influencing others."

Scales

Anita's responses on the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (scale of 1-4) indicated that she perceives herself to be very strong in most areas. Her highest subscale scores were in Scholastic Competence, Job Competence, and Global Self-Worth (1.0). Her lowest score, other than Athletic Competence, which was 2.6, was in Romantic Appeal (1.8), still a very strong score.

On the Motivational Orientation Scale (scale of 1-5), Anita agreed most with feeling successful when the work is challenging and she must use strategic effort (Task Orientation I, 1.7), followed by not looking dumb, doing well without trying, and having easy work/not having homework (Avoid Inferiority, Easy Superiority, & Work Avoidance, 2.0). She agreed least with statements indicating that she feels successful when tricking the teacher or getting away with doing very little (Alienation, 3.75).

Anita agreed strongly with many of the purposes of school. She felt most strongly that school should teach Persistence (1.0), prepare students for Creative Work and teach students to work cooperatively and help others (Community Spirit, 1.25). The only purpose she disagreed with strongly was to help students attain Wealth (4.0). Her scores for all other factors were between 1.0 and 2.0.

Interview

> It's in my nature to not sit around. . . and not listen to the teacher. I pay attention; I like to do things. I like to learn new things, and . . . felt I was a smart person, and I can do it. Yeah! I can be an honor graduate.

So began Anita's interview in response to what motivated her to want to be an honor graduate. She had earned straight "A's" and mostly A's and B's in the ninth and tenth grades and therefore, knew that she would be able to do it, if she just kept up her grades. Anita kept herself on track by knowing all the courses she had to take, the number of credits she had to earn, and what was required to make and become an honor graduate.

Many of her friends also took Challenge, Honor, A, and AA courses. She noticed that she was well known among her classmates, many of whom knew her name. It was through this natural interaction that many individuals became friends--some from middle school and others since ninth grade. They received little extrinsic motivation from other students and perceived little

encouragement from high school circumstances. These friends knew that they wanted to be honor graduates but basically left it up to each individual to achieve this on her own. Sometimes, as friends, they figured out how to get lockers in the same area so that they could see each other in passing in the hallways and support each other, even with a smile, which kept their frustration levels down over the course of a day.

Anita was enrolled in a difficult history course as a senior. She felt like giving up but decided that she did know more about the subject than she had previously thought. She listened more attentively to this instructor and managed to complete the course. Most of Anita's support came from her mother who always encouraged her "to make good grades, . . . told her how smart and how proud she was" of her achievements.

Kenya

Biographical Information

Kenya, at 18, is the oldest of three siblings in her family; she has a brother who is 10 and a sister who is 5 years old. Her parents are divorced/separated, and therefore, she lives with a guardian, her 77-year-old grandmother. Her mother is a high school graduate but is unemployed. Kenya was born in this rural area where she received all of her formal schooling. She was involved in many extracurricular activities: Beta Club, National Honor Society, Honor Guard, Soccer, Debate Team, etc. She received numerous medals, awards, and a scholarship from a local community organization. She decided to stay in her hometown and attend the local university. Her major will be criminal justice because of society's influence.

She stated, "I have always wanted to be the best I could in whatever I chose to do. Being an honor graduate was only a goal that I had to achieve in order to try to reach other goals," in responding to why she wanted to be an honor graduate. Kenya graduated with both the highest GPA (93.639) and class standing (20 out of 275) of this group of participants. She was also enrolled in one Challenge class. Both Kenya and her grandmother thought that academic achievements were important; however, she was unable to get involved in many activities that required a fee because her guardian lived on a fixed income and was unable to afford some of them. To achieve good grades, Kenya studied her notes and read her text when her mind was clear, her stomach was full, and she was in a well-lighted place where she could get comfortable. Academic achievement was also important to her because she wanted to one day help society to

become better than it is. "The only way to do that is to excel in education and learn more of what to do about the situation."

Kenya's role model is her grandmother, an individual who supported her both financially and emotionally. Her grandmother, a "strong and determined" person, never gives up and was always in attendance at her activities to cheer her on.

Her career aspirations were influenced by her brother (10) and sister (5). Kenya stated, "They are the future. If my generation can correct some mistakes that were made, then my brother's and sister's generations can achieve more." She wants to help people toward being as productive as they can be in this society. Kenya's participation in the Upward Bound project helped her to achieve many goals and was highly valued by her.

Scales

Kenya's range of means on the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (Scale of 1-4) indicated that she perceives herself to be quite strong in all areas. Her two highest subscale scores were in Global Self-Worth and Close Friendships (1.0). The two lowest subscale scores were in Athletic Competence and Romantic Appeal (2.0). This is certainly one of the two highest profiles from among the participants.

On the Motivational Orientation Scale (scale of 1-5), Kenya indicated that she feels most successful in school when the task is challenging and requires strategic effort and when she can avoid looking inferior (Task Orientation I & Avoid Inferiority, 1.0); however, she also feels successful when she stays busy and works hard (Task Orientation II, 1.5). There were three factors with which she tended to disagree: feeling successful by doing well without trying (Easy Superiority, 3.5); tricking the teacher or getting away with little work (Alienation, 3.75); and having easy work or no homework (Work Avoidance, 4.0).

Kenya strongly agreed that the purposes of school include teaching Persistence and the Understanding of Science (1.0). The categories she agreed with least were teaching duty and patriotism (Loyalty, 3.0) and helping students attain Wealth and leisure (3.75).

Interview

Kenya was very reflective when interviewed. She thought a while about what motivated her to want to be an honor graduate. This is what she said:

> Being that I came from a single parent home, I feel that my grandmother motivated me into becoming an honor graduate . . . In school, I was unable to participate in everything I wanted. By becoming an honor graduate, my kids or my nieces or nephews will be able to participate in any and everything they want because I would be supporting them financially, motivationally, and emotionally . . . it comes from within.

She always liked education and felt that she could do whatever she set her mind to do. Kenya stayed on track by keeping a schedule and organizing herself. No matter what, she wrote everything down. Upward Bound, numerous clubs, and JROTC helped Kenya to become involved with her peers. These organized groups involved students in many opportunities.

Kenya had good grades and was on the honor roll. She decided not to let anything stop her from becoming an honor graduate; therefore, she pushed herself to succeed at this goal as she had always pushed herself in everything since kindergarten. She had one friend in JROTC who supported her efforts. Kenya felt like giving up when she was having a difficult time in a trigonometry course. However, she hung in, studied more, kept going, and passed the course. Along with support from friends and her grandmother, Kenya also had an aunt who valued education and supported her. She said, "whenever I needed to talk to her at any time she was always there and pushed me to do whatever I needed to do in order to achieve my goals."

Mika

Biographical Information

Mika is an 18-year-old who was born in the Great Lakes region of the United States, but has been living in this rural community for more than 13 years. She is a middle child and has a sister who is 21 and a brother who is 14 years old. Her parents earned graduate degrees (Ph.D.s) in their area of speciality and are faculty at a university. Mika participated in many extracurricular activities including: Drama Club, Beta Club, Debate Club, Swim Team, etc. She received numerous awards from her participation. Mika will attend a southern university and enroll as a pre-veterinary medicine major because of her experiences with animals/pets. She plans to be an exotic animal veterinarian.

Family and friends motivated her to want to be an honor graduate. Mika graduated with a 91.750 GPA and class standing of 35 out of 275. Mika's scores are even more impressive considering that she enrolled in seven Challenge courses and in three joint enrollment classes in the

local university during her senior year. Academic achievements were very important to Mika and her parents. Mika said that she prepared for tests by reading. She said, "without an education, you severely limit your choices in life."

Scales

Mika, like several of the other participants, perceived herself to be strong in most areas assessed on the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (Scale of 1-4). One noticeable difference was that she saw herself as a good athlete (Athletic Competence, 1.2), whereas, athletics was clearly the weakest area for the group as a whole (2.67). Mika is attending college on an athletic scholarship. Her highest subscale scores were in Scholastic Competence, Behavioral Conduct, Close Friendships, and Global Self-Worth (1.0). Her lowest area was in Physical Appearance (2.5) which is about the same as the females in the Harter samples.

She agreed strongly with only one factor of the Motivational Orientation Scale – that she feels most successful when tasks are challenging and require strategic effort (Task Orientation I, 1.7). Mika tended to disagree with all other factors, but especially disagreed with feeling successful when she works hard and stays busy (Task Orientation II) and tricking the teacher or getting away with doing very little (Alienation, 4.0).

Mika agreed strongly that schools should teach students to: Understand Politics (1.75), learn Persistence, and seek Creative Work (2.0). She disagreed most strongly that schools should teach duty and patriotism (Loyalty, 3.67) and recognize and promote the success of the smartest students (Status II, 4.0) and help students attain wealth and leisure (Wealth, 4.0).

Interview

Mika stated that she always had good grades, and didn't think all that much about being an honor graduate. As a freshman, a friend told her that she was working toward being an honor graduate. Mika "thought that would just be a real nice honor". . . and "just never thought that it wasn't possible." To keep herself on track, Mika "just" always watched her grades. She said, "If I started to slip in class, I would make sure I studied harder, have study groups, go talk to the teacher and see what needed to be done to pull my average up."

Many students who were friends encouraged each other and tried to help each other keep their averages up. Because they were involved in some of the same organizations, they got another

chance to reinforce the encouragement. The students did not form a group per se but were just friends. Mika said:

> Several of the other girls had gone to middle school together and had just known each other from that . . . a lot of us were in Girl Scouts together . . . We . . . basically . . . were the only black kids in the upper level Challenge courses . . . and just being in those courses, we got to know each other that way and became friends.

Mika, additionally, said the following about how the subject of becoming honor graduates came up.

> . . . with the whole group, we probably really didn't talk about it that much until our senior year, and it was about to be very close . . . all of us realized that we probably were going to be honor graduates and because there were so many of us we just thought it was great. Through high school and then Challenge courses, we had always studied with each other . . . all of us would try and compare grades somewhat . . . just to try to keep our averages up . . . If someone made really low, then for the next test, we would be sure to study together.

Being an honor graduate was not a decision that was made as a group. However, during the senior year of many of these friends, and because they had kept their averages up, it became a goal that they all worked toward. They had lockers on the same hall, were involved in some of the same extracurricular activities, hung out, and went to movies and parties together.

One obstacle that Mika faced before she even got to high school was getting a recommendation for a Challenge history course. An eighth grade teacher wouldn't recommend her even though she had a high average–one higher than a friend who had been recommended. Mika did inquire as to why she was not recommended and was told by the teacher that because Mika was on the swim team, the teacher felt that she (Mika) would not have time to do all the extra studying even though the friend who was recommended was also a member of the swim team. Both friends asked for further explanation from the teacher and were told that the teacher thought that Mika's friend had a better background in history than Mika. She was forced to take the regular level history, did well in the class, and did get her recommendation the following year. She was able again to be in a class with many of her friends; she excelled in this Challenge history course.

Mika's parents, her role models, gave her support. Her father stayed up late many nights to assist her with mathematics and science courses, while Mika's mother would always proofread her papers and help her to study for history tests. They were a very positive influence on Mika and contributed greatly to her becoming an honor graduate.

Preliminary Findings

Methodology

One of the expectations of the research group was that these young women had evolved into a fairly cohesive group that had begun to form during their freshman year. Thus the structured interview contained questions that inquired about the influence of a group or groups on motivation. Their responses to the interview indicated that they did not see themselves as a formal group; they were friends. If we were to conduct this study again, we would restructure the interview using language such as peers/friends rather than the unclear term group(s). It is interesting to note that the honor graduate who did not participate in the study was known but not considered as close a friend to the nine participants. Although this study reports on 6 of the 10 honor graduates, three other data sets for individuals are incomplete at this time.

Demographic and Normative Data

All the participants were 18 or 19 years old, had ability scores in the average to above average range, received diplomas for completion of college preparation curriculum, and were planning to enroll in five universities located in three southern states. Most will be first generation college students.

All had completed their kindergarten to high school education in the same county but in different public schools through eighth grade. One was identified as gifted and participated in the gifted program while in elementary school. Their articulated identity was as black females as opposed to African-American.

High school transcripts indicated that grade point averages (GPA's) of the six participants ranged from 89.86 to 93.64, with a mean (M) of 91.80 and standard deviation (SD) of 1.41. The SAT-I verbal scores ranged from 430 to 620, with a mean (M) of 525 and standard deviation (SD) of 75.83. The SAT-I math scores ranged from 420 to 630, with a mean (M) of 502 and standard deviation (SD) of 74.14. The total SAT-I scores ranged from 880 to 1250, with a total mean (M) of 1027 and standard deviation (SD) of 139.81.

The K-BIT Vocabulary scores of the participants ranged from 97 to 113, with a mean (M) of 102.50 and a standard deviation (SD) of 5.67. The Matrices scores ranged from 89 to 115, with a mean (M) of 104 and a standard deviation (SD) of 9.12. The Composite IQ scores ranged from 93 to 116, with a mean (M) of 103.67 and a standard deviation (SD) of 7.47.

Motivational Themes and Self-Perception

A very preliminary examination of the group mean subscale scores for the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (Harter, 1988) indicated that as a group, the participants perceived themselves to be strongest in Behavioral Conduct (1.2 with 1.0 the highest possible score and 4.0 the lowest possible score). Global Self-Worth (1.33) and Social Acceptance (1.37) were also very positive. The only domain in which the group mean indicated negative self-perceptions was Athletic Competence (2.67, with any score above 2.5 being considered negative). The next weakest domains were Job Competence and Romantic Appeal (1.77).

On the Motivational Orientation Scale (Nicholls, 1989), the factor the group agreed with most was Task Orientation I (mean=1.57, when 1=agreement and 5=disagreement). That is, the participants felt most successful when learning new and interesting things, solving tricky or complex problems, understanding complicated ideas, and thinking. It was also relatively important to the group as a whole to not look dumb and to do well without trying or studying (Avoid Inferiority and Easy Superiority, 2.42), as well as to look smart by doing better than others (Ego Orientation, 2.57). Information gained from the interviews suggested that this might be an important area to investigate in depth in that a number of the participants spoke about having to insist on being allowed to take more difficult classes and work to be recognized as capable students. Although they were clearly strongly task oriented, the need to prove themselves in comparison with other students was still a significant issue. Not surprisingly, they tended to disagree most with feeling successful when work was easy or could be avoided (Work Avoidance, 3.13) and when fooling around and getting away with it or tricking the teacher (Alienation, 3.75).

On the Scales for Assessing the Purposes of School (Nicholls, 1989) the group agreed most strongly that the purposes of school were to teach students to overcome obstacles, set high standards and not give up (Persistence, mean=1.36) and to prepare students for challenging jobs, to be creative problem solvers, and to be imaginative (Creative Work, mean=1.75). Nicholls combined these two factors to form the Achievement Motivation scale. The next highest scale was

Understanding (mean=1.96), which consists of understanding science, the media , and politics. It appeared on preliminary inspection of the remaining two scales, Social Commitment and Wealth and Status, that the factors making up these scales seem to cluster differently for this study than for the Nicholls' study. This is an issue to be investigated in the in-depth analysis. For example, Nicholls' Social Commitment Scale consists of both Community Spirit and Loyalty, along with Self-Sacrifice and Useful Work. As a group, these participants agreed fairly strongly that schools should prepare students to be active in the community and work cooperatively with others (Community Spirit, 1.92), but were quite neutral about teaching patriotism and duty (Loyalty. 2.89).

Support Structures

All had support from parents and other family members. Although the relationships varied, more frequently mothers and grandmothers were identified as role models. Academic achievement support from parents was generally reported in terms of "do your best" and not perceived as pressure by these young women.

The casual and yet consistent support from friends was a striking finding. Rarely in class together, even when taking the same course, the class setting was the primary vehicle for identifying each other. Outside of class, both in the school setting and away from it, they introduced one another to the group, encouraged each other, studied and played together. They created ways to keep in touch in the school setting: by requesting lockers near one another, by meeting with someone at lunch, and just passing in the halls between classes. They did not perceive themselves as a group nor was there a leader; they were "just" friends who supported each other's efforts to do their best. At times there was some competition, but it was positive, resulting in no one looking bad in the other's eyes.

Apparently, some of these students did not think about being an honor graduate early in high school, but realized that they had earned good grades, wanted to keep their average as high as they could, and really didn't think about becoming an honor graduate until their senior year. They knew that there weren't many African-American students who had achieved honor graduate status in their high school's history, and therefore, decided that they would have a large group--the largest in the history of their high school.

Confidence in their ability to succeed, persistent hard work and wanting to show themselves that as black females they could be honor graduates were among the common themes. They also wanted to show others–parents and family as well as students and teachers whether black or white—that black students could be honor graduates. Other consistently articulated goals were related to future expectations regarding getting admitted to college, the pursuit of career opportunities and lifestyle variables. Even though not all had clear career aspirations, they connected doing well academically to the ultimate achievement of future goals. NONE of the participants reported receiving any information or assistance from counselors, staff or teachers regarding career decisions.

School Climate

The participants did not identify any circumstances associated with the high school that assisted their efforts, outside of the encouragement provided by a few isolated teachers, and in fact, school climate (e.g., teacher expectations, relationships with teachers, etc.) may have been negative. The failure of the school to encourage higher academic aspirations even to the point where they had to fight for recognition might have motivated the participants to prove their capabilities. In addition, the criteria for being honor graduates works against students enrolled in Challenge courses and may in fact discourage some students from enrolling because no weighting is applied for more difficult classes or for the diploma being sought. Yet all these young women still enrolled in at least one Challenge class. Four of them enrolled in two to four Challenge classes, and one enrolled in seven. All but one, enrolled in the college preparatory section of Advanced Algebra and Trigonometry, and all but one enrolled in a computer technology class.

Educational Implications

The findings of this study provide some insight into the relative significance of a variety of constructs related to motivation as shared and described by the six African-American young women in this study. Persistence, early support systems which helped build a belief in achievement, and peer support and networking were major factors in setting and achieving goals. Individuals who are in positions to be influential – family members, teachers, counselors, coaches, club advisors, etc.–can assist minority females by: providing support and persistently encouraging them to do their best, facilitating the development of friendships and the establishment of mentor relationships, and by being sure they are aware of opportunities, options and requirements.

Disturbing were the findings reflected in their descriptions that relayed messages of a lack of acceptance, lower expectations, and isolation. This group of friends had the personal fortitude to turn these circumstances to their advantage, but will most students in the same circumstances respond in like manner? Educational institutions must address these barriers to success in both policy and practice. All participants involved in educational institutions must work to remove the attitudinal and policy/practice barriers that result in failure to recognize and value the contributions of minority students. The discomfort and threat that maintain these conditions must be overcome.

Another implication was stated best by Karen Arnold (1994) who "chronicled the first systematic, longitudinal investigation of the life paths of high school valedictorians: the Illinois Valedictorian Project" (p. x). She stated that

> . . . capable, motivated minority youths, women, and first generation . . . students are not being enabled to develop their talents fully; they continue to lack knowledge of occupational alternatives and career management processes . . . . For all students, a network of career exploration opportunities, sponsors, and mentors is a critical accompaniment to course work. (p.291)

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APPENDIX A

Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (Harter, 1988)

Content of Each Domain.

1. **Scholastic Competence.** This subscale taps adolescents' perception of their competence or ability within the realm of scholastic performance, e.g., how well they are doing at classwork, and how smart or intelligent one feels one is.

2. **Social Acceptance.** This subscale taps the degree to which adolescents are accepted by peers, feel popular, have a lot of friends, and feel that they are easy to like.

3. **Athletic Competence.** This subscale taps adolescents' perceptions of their athletic ability and competence at sports, e.g., feelings that one is good at sports and athletic activities.

4. **Physical Appearance.** This subscale taps the degree to which adolescents are happy with the way they look, like one's body, and feel that they are good-looking.

5. **Job Competence.** This subscale taps the extent to which adolescents feel that they have job skills, are ready to do well at part-time jobs, and feel that they are doing well at the jobs they have.

6. **Romantic Appeal.** This subscale taps teenagers perceptions that they are romantically attractive to those in whom they are interested, are dating the people they would like to be dating, and feel that they are fun and interesting on a date.

7. **Behavioral Conduct.** This subscale taps the degree to which one likes the way one behaves, does the right thing, acts the way one is supposed to, and avoids getting into trouble.

8. **Close Friendship.** This subscale taps one's ability to make close friends they can share personal thoughts and secrets with.

9. **Global Self-Worth.** These items tap the extent to which the adolescent likes oneself as a person, rather than domain-specific competence or adequacy.

APPENDIX B

Motivational Orientation Scales (Nicholls, 1989)

Task Orientation I – learning new and interesting things, solving tricky problems, understanding complicated ideas, having to think

Task Orientation II – staying busy, working hard

Ego Orientation – desiring to enhance the self by establishing one's superiority to others

Avoid Inferiority – not looking dumb or stupid

Easy Superiority – doing well without trying or studying

Work Avoidance – not having homework, having easy work

Alienation – getting away with doing very little, fooling around, tricking teacher

APPENDIX C

Scales for Assessing the Purposes of School (Nicholls, 1989)

Wealth and Status

Wealth – to prepare students for jobs that will give them wealth, leisure, etc.

Status I – to prepare students to compete for top jobs and colleges

Status II – to recognize and promote the success of the smartest students

Social Commitment

Community Spirit – to prepare students to be active in the community, work cooperatively, help others

Loyalty – to teach duty and patriotism, to be law-abiding citizens

Self-Sacrifice – to teach students to respect authority, follow orders when they don't feel like it

Useful Work – to prepare students to make a better world, help society, improve others' lives

Understanding

Understanding Science – to understand the effects of new inventions, nature, technology

Understanding the Media – to think critically about what they read/ see on TV

Understanding Politics – to vote wisely, assess issues, understand the role of U.S. in World

Achievement Motivation

Creative Work – to prepare students for challenging jobs, to keep learning, be imaginative, and be creative problem solvers

Persistence – to overcome obstacles, don't give up, set high standards